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“An ingenious, and profitable kind of meditation”

Jehan de Saintré and the crusade

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“AN INGENIOUS, AND PROFITABLE KIND OF MEDITATION”

Jehan de Saintré and the crusade

The title for this paper is taken, oddly enough, from Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*: he is talking about Waterloo, and “those who [...] speculate about what MIGHT have happened in the world, but for the fatal occurrence of what actually DID take place”; this is, he says, “a most puzzling, amusing, ingenious, and profitable kind of meditation”. What I hope to suggest here is that Antoine de La Sale's crusade narrative, in his *Jehan de Saintré*, is an example of precisely this sort of amusing and ingenious and profitable exercise: that it is – is perhaps designed to be – just such a rectification of history; that it is, and I shall return more fully later to this point, a textbook early example of what we now call “the counterfactual”.

First, though, Saintré's crusade¹. Jehan's career, orchestrated by his secret mistress the Dame des Belles Cousines, has reached a chivalric apotheosis, and he lacks only one thing, one exploit, to reach the heights that she has planned for him: participation in a crusade (he has, indeed, refused to be dubbed knight until this can be done on the crusade battlefield)². A crusade is duly proclaimed, and extraordinarily, the mere squire Saintré is made the leader of the sizeable contingent of French knights and nobles who sign up for the expedition. They set off for one of the epicentres of the “crusading” movement in fourteenth-century

1 I use the edition by J. Misrahi and C. A. Knudson, Geneva, Droz, 1965 (references henceforward in the text, prefaced JS); the account of the crusade occupies p. 186-222. For an English translation, see *Jehan de Saintré: A Late Medieval Education in Love and Chivalry*, trans. R. L. Krueger and J. H. M. Taylor, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania University Press, 2014, p. 125-149.

2 That the ultimate deed, for a knight, was participation in a crusade is universally recognised: Philippe de Mézières, for instance, maintains that “the first and principal glory of the dignity of true chivalry is to fight for the faith”; quoted by N. Saul, *For Honour and Fame: Chivalry in England, 1066-1500*, London, Bodley Head, 2011, p. 219.

Europe – Prussia (now roughly in Poland and Germany); when they arrive in Thorun, the headquarters of the Teutonic Order which coordinates and governs such expeditions, they are joined by a huge contingent of knights from all over the Empire, including the king of Bohemia himself¹. They go into battle, however, not against the pagan Lithuanians, but against an overwhelming army of “Saracens” hailing from the East and from North Africa, led by the Grand Turk of Persia, the Emperor of Constantinople, and the Sultan of Babylon. Just before battle is engaged, Saintr  has himself knighted on the field by the king of Bohemia – and then performs extraordinary deeds of valour, which include his killing, in person, the Grand Turk. The Christians conquer, resoundingly and bloodily, and Saintr  returns to a hero’s welcome in Paris.

Now, not all of this is mere absurdity. The fourteenth century – which is when the real Jehan de Saintr  is attested in a scatter of documents (La Sale has him die in 1368)² – was indeed the period when the Teutonic Order flourished in Prussia, and when an expedition against the pagan Lithuanians was a recognised way of spending the summer in a meritoriously Christian, if by all accounts miserably uncomfortable, crusade. The Christian participants in La Sale’s account – although their numbers far outweigh any real expedition setting off for northern Europe – do have some basis in authenticity: there are, roughly, 160 French knights, a little squadron of English ones, and that huge list of 200 or so knights from all over the Empire: the Low Countries, Germany, Poland ... each of which lists must almost certainly have been copied from an existing roll of arms³. We should not either be too distracted by the fact that La Sale calls the enemy “Saracens”: he is not alone in using this as the

1 Assuming that the (fictional) period of Saintr ’s crusade would be mid-fourteenth century, this might, appropriately, be John the Blind, King of Bohemia, who was so romantically killed at the Battle of Cr cy in 1346: see C. Raynaud, “Jean de Luxembourg   Cr cy dans les *Chroniques* de Jean Froissart”, in *The Online Froissart*, ed. P. F. Ainsworth and G. Croenen, v. 1.5; see website for *The Online Froissart*.

2 See C. A. Knudson, “The Two Saintr s”, *Romance Studies in Memory of Edward B. Ham*, Hayward CA, California State College, 1967, p. 73–80.

3 It is impossible to identify with precision either the French or the Empire roll, although a critic has related them to the so-called *Armorial d’Urf *: see J.-B. de Vaivre, “L’h raldique dans le roman du *Petit Jehan de Saintr *”, *Cabiers d’h raldique du C.N.R.S.*, 3, 1977, p. 65–83. See also C. A. Knudson, “The Prussian Expedition in *Jehan de Saintr *”, * tudes de langue et de litt rature du Moyen  ge offertes   F lix Lecoy*, Paris, Champion, 1973, p. 271–277; Knudson argues that some of the names present suggest that the roll must date, in all probability, from the mid-fourteenth century.

generic term for "non-Christians" ... Where, however, he leaves history far behind is with that vast infidel army – its troops drawn from India and Africa and Morocco and Tunisia and under the command of the Grand Turk himself – with the crushing victory of the Christian army over them, and with Saintré's remarkable, and triumphant, duel with the Grand Turk¹. Wish-fulfilment? No doubt, but I want to suggest that there is more at stake here: what we are seeing, I believe, is urgent preoccupations from the writer's fifteenth-century present informing his projections into the past of the previous century.

Consider, first, the date La Sale gives in his coda for his completion of *Jehan de Saintré*: March 1455². Less than two years or so before, of course, Christendom had suffered a crushing blow: on 29 May 1453, after a long siege, Constantinople fell to the Turks under Mehmet II. When the news reached the West a month later, at the end of June, it was greeted with consternation and with immediate and ambitious, though ultimately fruitless, plans to retake the city and restore it to Christian rule³. We should avoid words like "propaganda" – but quite apart from the shock occasioned all over Europe by the disaster, La Sale had multiple reasons to engage with the event and to make "crusading" a centrepiece of his own fiction⁴.

First, his close association, over so many years from 1399 to 1448, with the house of Anjou-Provence and with René d'Anjou – who considered himself also, and significantly in this context, titular king

1 On Saintré's crusade, see J. H. M. Taylor "La fonction de la croisade dans *Jehan de Saintré*", *Croisades et idée de croisade à la fin du Moyen Âge: Cahiers de Recherches Médiévales*, 1, 1996, p. 192-204; C. Gaullier-Bougassas, "La croisade dans le roman chevaleresque du x^v siècle", *Du roman courtois au roman baroque*, ed. E. Bury and F. Mora, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 2004, p. 295-307; M. Szkilnik, *Jehan de Saintré: une carrière chevaleresque au x^v siècle*, Geneva, Droz, 2003, p. 95-121.

2 Although the first dated manuscript of the romance is given as 1456...

3 See most recently N. Housley, *Crusading and the Ottoman Threat, 1453-1505*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012; see also N. Housley, *The Later Crusades, 1274-1580: From Lyons to Alcazar*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992.

4 Even more so if the "Gadiffer de La Sale" who, our La Sale says (JS, p. 215), was the standard-bearer for the French contingent, was his own forebear. Gadiffer had a career not unlike the one our La Sale imagines for Saintré, and made crusading expeditions twice to Prussia, and also to Rhodes and "Barbary": see M. Keen, "Gadifer de La Salle: A Late Medieval Knight Errant", *The Ideals and Practice of Medieval Knighthood: Papers from the First and Second Strawberry Hill Conferences*, ed. C. Harper-Bill and R. Harvey, Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 1986, p. 74-85.

of Jerusalem¹. Jerusalem was, of course, long gone as the capital of the crusader kingdom of which it had been the centre; René himself never took part in a crusade (his focus remained the rather more accessible kingdoms of Naples and Sicily)²; unlike the duke of Burgundy, he seems not to have reacted with any urgency to the fall of Constantinople, possibly because his wife Isabelle de Lorraine died also in 1453³. But that said, he paid lip-service at least throughout his life to notions of the pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and indeed of crusade – for instance with the conceit of his tournament at Nancy in 1445 being a mock battle with a *geant sarrazin*⁴; the notional kingship was one which he seems, rather ineffectually, to have cherished – as did his son and Antoine's former pupil, Jean de Calabre, to whom *Saintré* is dedicated. By the time that *Saintré* was composed, however, and as from 1448, La Sale was in the service of a quite different patron, Louis de Luxembourg, Count of Saint-Pol, an adept of the house of Burgundy, who was later to be *connétable de France* – and whose crusading ambitions were of a rather more enterprising and immediate order than were those of the Anjou dynasty⁵.

1 The title came to him via the marriage of Frederick II Hohenstaufen with Isabelle (or Yolande) de Brienne, Queen of Jerusalem, in 1225; Charles, Duke of Anjou, bought the right to the crown, validated by Pope John XXI, in 1277. We should note that René founded his "Ordre du Croissant", an earnest of his crusading ambitions, in 1448; see N. Coulet and É. Verry, "Le roi René: de l'histoire à la légende", *Le roi René dans tous ses États (1409-1480)*, ed. J.-M. Matz and É. Verry, Paris, Éditions du Patrimoine, Centre des monuments nationaux, 2009, p. 203-226.

2 His will, however, drawn up on 29 June 1453 and thus in the immediate aftermath of the disaster, enjoined on his heir the "pilgrimage to Jerusalem" (that is, crusade) which he, René, had been unable to make.

3 See J. Paviot, "Le roi René, l'idée de croisade et l'Orient", *René d'Anjou (1409-1480): pouvoirs et gouvernement*, ed. J.-M. Matz and N.-Y. Tonnerre, Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2011, p. 313-323; see also C. de Mérindol, "L'imaginaire du pouvoir à la fin du Moyen Âge: les prétentions royales", *Représentation, pouvoir et royauté: Actes du colloque organisé par l'Université du Maine, les 25 et 26 mars 1994*, ed. J. Blanchard, Paris, Picard, 1995, p. 65-92.

4 On this and other of René's *pas d'armes* as inflected by the crusading spirit, see C. de Mérindol, *Les fêtes de chevalerie à la cour du roi René; emblématique, art et histoire: les joutes de Nancy, le pas de Saumur et le pas de Tarascon*, Paris, Éditions du CTHS, 1993.

5 He was also, notably, an adept of the tournament: he held a great tournament at Cambrai in 1454 which incurred great expense, to the dismay of Mathieu d'Escouchy, *Chronique*, ed. G. du Fresne de Beaucourt, Paris, Vve de J. Renouart, 1863-1864, vol. 2, p. 241. Note moreover that La Sale was to dedicate his treatise on tournaments (1459) to Jacques de Luxembourg, Louis's brother; see Sylvie Lefèvre, *Antoine de la Sale: la fabrique de l'œuvre et de l'écrivain*, Geneva, Droz, 2006, p. 225-229.

Although, of course, in reaction to the news of the fall of Constantinople and only seven or so months later, in very early 1454, Philippe de Bourgogne, planning for the leadership of a pan-European crusading initiative, organised one of the more spectacular responses: the so-called *Banquet du Faisan* at which the members of his court, and visitors from elsewhere in Europe, were invited in the course of a sumptuous banquet to make vows of splendid (and implausible) deeds against the Turks. At Philippe's own table was ... Louis de Luxembourg, La Sale's patron, whose vow, to be among the first to engage with the Infidels, seems to have been the very first made in the series¹:

Je veue aux dames et au faisant que, ainchois que soit six sepmainnes, je porteray une emprinse à intencion de faire armes à pié et à cheval, et laquelle je porteray an et jour en la plus grant partie du temps; et ne laisseray, pour chose nul qui m'avieigne, se le Roy ne le me commande, où quelque armée soufisant se face à aler sur les infidelles, par le Roy en sa personne, ou par son commandement, ou autrement pour y aler, en laquelle armée, se c'est le bon plaisir du Roy, afin de faire service à crestienté, je yray de très bon cœur et metteray painne, ou plaisir de Dieu, de estre des premiers qui assamblent avec les infidelles.

It is, incidentally, notable that *Saintré* stages its own rather muted, throwaway ceremony of vows (though with no crusading intent) when the hero, Jehan himself, is made to swear on a dressed peacock the accomplishment of a perfectly secular *emprise*²: writing in 1454 to 1455 under the patronage of Louis de Luxembourg, La Sale cannot have been unaware of the topicality of such an exercise³...

1 See C. de Mérindol, "Le Banquet du Faisan. Jérusalem et l'esprit de croisade hors de la Bourgogne à la veille de la prise de Constantinople", *Le Banquet du Faisan, 1454: l'Occident face au défi de l'Empire ottoman*, ed. M.-T. Caron and D. Clauzel, Arras, Artois Presses Université, 1997, p. 71-83, at p. 76. Louis is named, although not by the historian usually quoted on the *Banquet*, Olivier de La Marche, as the first to vow in three manuscripts recounting the *Vœux*; see P. Cockshaw, "Les *Vœux du Faisan*, étude manuscrite et établissement du texte", *Le Banquet du Faisan, 1454*, ed. Caron and Clauzel, p. 115-121.

2 See JS, p. 84. There is a literary antecedent, with Jacques de Longuyon's *Vœux du Paon* (c.1312) which tells how Alexander the Great and his courtiers swore courtly oaths on a dressed peacock; the ducal library contained a number of copies of the *Vœux* (see J. Barrois, *Bibliothèque prototypographique, ou, Librairies des fils du roi Jean, Charles V, Jean de Berri, Philippe de Bourgogne et les siens*, Paris, Crapelet, 1830, nos. 1351, 1352, 1375, 1476), but given the date, 1454, the Burgundy *Vœux du Faisan* remain a more probable inspiration.

3 See M. Santucci, "Jehan de Saintré et le Banquet du Faisan", *Manger et boire au Moyen Âge. Actes du colloque de Nice, 15-17 octobre 1982*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1984, p. 429-440.

La Sale, then, moved in circles, and depended on patronage, in which crusading discussions were rampant, and in which he might well expect an account, however fictional, of a brilliantly successful crusade to be welcomed by either of his patrons, and by the dedicatee of the romance. But what I want to argue here is something rather more specific: that the crusade section¹ of his *Saintré* is an early example of what is today usually called counterfactual fiction². Briefly, counterfactual fiction (or history) makes use of historical personæ and historical circumstances, while drastically and dramatically altering their stories. Novels of the counterfactual sort embark on a dialectical game in which modes of reference are carefully, subtly, deployed to signify historical reality – but the “history” that they refashion changes or reverses actions taken or outcomes produced at some major, important historical turning-point, and then explores the consequences: Robert Harris’s *Fatherland*, for instance, published in 1992 and set in 1964, imagines that Hitler has won the Second World War and is still in power in Europe; Philip Roth’s *The Plot Against America* (2004) that the isolationist Charles Lindbergh has defeated Roosevelt in the presidential election of 1940. In essence, counterfactual novels coordinate fiction, as here, around a handful of familiar historical facts – and I stress, here, the word “familiar”: counterfactual fiction depends for its effect, crucially, on the audience’s knowledge of the actual historical record, and of the more uncontroversial facts which underlie the fiction: a reader must be conscious of the extratextual historical reality against which he or she is to measure the fiction³, and therefore recognise the

1 I stress the crusade section; the romance as a whole is of course a fiction. But it plays with history, not only in this section but also in its accounts of chivalric encounters: see Szkilnik, *Jean de Saintré*, especially p. 71-94, and Lefèvre, *Antoine de la Sale*. It might, on the other hand, be argued that the crusade section is so far the summit of Jehan’s chivalric career that his triumph here, and in his jousts and *pas d’armes*, inflect the romance as a whole in the direction of the counterfactual...

2 Counterfactual fiction is usually said to emerge in the mid-nineteenth century, with Louis-Napoléon Geoffroy-Château’s 1836 novel *Napoléon et la conquête du monde* which reimagines Napoleon’s campaign in Russia as successful, then has him conquer the rest of Europe including Britain, and re-conquer Jerusalem from the Ottomans; see K. Hellekson, *The Alternate History: Refiguring Historical Time*, Kent OH and London, Kent State University Press, 2013, p. 13-15. In a recent book, however, the historian R. J. Evans suggests that a romance like *Tirant lo Blanc*, composed in c. 1490, might legitimately be described as counterfactual, in describing a world in which the Byzantine defeats the Ottoman empire: see his *Altered Pasts: Counterfactuals in History*, London, Little, Brown, 2014, p. 7.

3 It is noticeable, of course, that both the novels I mention above take as their point of historical departure notorious and key, and above all recent, turning-points which cannot

ways in which the alternate history they are reading invites, insistently, hypothetical thinking. The "game", as it were, is designed for an informed audience aware that it is being asked – temporarily – to overlay an explicit framework of historical fact with a new and intriguing hypothesis; if that hypothesis is to have resonance, then the "doubleness" of the fiction (its underpinning in and recasting of historical fact) asks the reader to recall what he or she knows, from other sources, about the history. The writer of counterfactual fiction therefore must ensure that he or she creates an imaginative space capable of incorporating real social and political histories¹, and must take pains not altogether to defy plausibility – but within those constraints, he or she can satisfyingly explore the epistemological and cultural repercussions of what is actually an experiment with history.

Now, La Sale's *Saintré* is as a whole, quite explicitly, what we would now call an historical novel²: a fourteenth-century Jean is historically attested, though in no great detail, as having for instance fought at Poitiers in 1356. We know very little about him – as Szkilnik says, La Sale appears to have chosen for hero someone deliberately obscure, a bit-part-player on the historical stage³. Might La Sale have garnered, somewhere, more details on his life story? Might the historical Saintré have taken part in a Prussian crusade? These questions are unanswerable – and in any case do not affect my argument here, which will propose that the "extratextual historical reality", against which the author builds

but be familiar to readers. So, for instance, although indeed the *Chanson de Roland* rewrites the history of a relatively obscure losing skirmish in the Pyrenees, it cannot easily be described as "counterfactual" because it is very unlikely that its audience was aware of the historical record.

- 1 There are of course similarities here with the way in which historical fiction deploys a wealth of background detail suggesting that its fictional universe is historically accurate: see for instance G. Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. H. and S. Mitchell, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1969, or L. Hutcheon who, in her *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, New York, Routledge, 1988, shows the importance of historical fiction deploying real figures of the past to validate or authenticate the fictional world by their presence; see also, for the Middle Ages, R. Morse, "'This Vague Relation': Historical Fiction and Historical Veracity in the Later Middle Ages", *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 13, 1982, p. 85-103. The difference, however, is that the formal and ontological sleight of hand operated in counterfactual fiction allows the event itself to be rewritten, not the fiction-within-the-historical-universe as is the case with historical fiction.
- 2 The term is controversial – but the Burgundian penchant for "historical" romances is well known: see R. Morse, "Historical Fiction in Fifteenth-Century Burgundy", *Modern Language Review*, 75, 1980, p. 48-84, and Morse, "'This Vague Relation'".
- 3 Szkilnik, *Jean de Saintré*, p. 14-16, 34-35.

his counterfactual crusade, is an amalgamation of the Northern Crusades with a counterfactual rewriting of the disastrous crusade of Nicopolis.

What links these enterprises, as far as La Sale is concerned, is one of the two major models that La Sale seems to have used for his own Jehan de Saintr : the figure of Jean le Meingre, known as Boucicaut¹. Boucicaut figures quite large and explicitly, in person in the romance, as Saintr 's friend and ally: they become brothers in arms, undertake joint *emprises*². Now, Boucicaut took part no fewer than three times in what were known as the summer campaigns, *sommer-reysen*, which for a century, from 1283 to 1406, were conducted almost annually in Northern Europe, Prussia³. Most of these campaigns, although they were brutally destructive, were on a relatively small scale: volunteers from the courts and cities of Europe would make their way north to the distinctly inhospitable Prussian war-theatre, would be welcomed and deployed under the auspices of the Teutonic Order, would fight somewhat inconclusive skirmishes, and then return to France or elsewhere before the onset of the ferocious northern winter, congratulating themselves, no doubt, on having fought valiantly for God and Christendom. Some expeditions, of course, were rather more sizeable: Knudson points to one such, in the summer of 1348, which involved contingents from Germany, France and England and which was unusually successful⁴, and Boucicaut himself took part in a more major sortie, in 1391, which, it was said, very implausibly, involved 200,000 Christian combatants, but the results of which were typically inconclusive⁵.

But if we are to look for a more telling precedent for a huge expedition against the *Sarrazins*, then we should certainly look to what is usually

1 See D. Lalande, "Le couple Saintr -Boucicaut dans le roman de *Jehan de Saintr *", *Romania*, 111, 1990, p. 481-494. Boucicaut's chivalric biography, *Le livre des fais du bon messire Jehan le Maingre, dit Bouciquaut, mareschal de France et gouverneur de Jennes*, is edited by D. Lalande, Geneva, Droz, 1985; see also the study by Lalande, *Jehan II le Meingre, dit Boucicaut (1366-1421)*, Geneva, Droz, 1988, and, very much more succinctly, N. Housley, *The Crusaders*, Stroud, Tempus, 2002, p. 139-172. Boucicaut's Prussian expeditions took place in 1384, 1385, and 1390-1391.

2 See JS, p. 141 ff.

3 On these, see especially E. Christiansen, *The Northern Crusades*, London, Penguin Books, 1997. For Boucicaut's own participation in the Northern crusades, see Lalande, *Jehan II le Meingre*, p. 17-39.

4 Knudson, "The Prussian Expedition", p. 276.

5 See Lalande, *Jehan II le Meingre*, p. 37-38, and Housley, *The Crusaders*, p. 156-157.

called the Nicopolis crusade, of 1396, in which Boucicaut was also a prominent participant¹. The energy that drove it came largely, and in this context significantly, from ducal Burgundy. The French and Burgundian contingent of the army, in this instance, was much the best equipped, but like Saintré's crusade, the force also included large groups of crusaders from the Empire. It was designed to counter Ottoman advances in the Balkans, but came to a catastrophic end when the crusading army fought and lost a pitched battle with the Sultan Bayezid I just outside Nicopolis [Nikopol] in Bulgaria (on the Danube, on the border between today's Bulgaria and Romania)²: catastrophic in the number of dead and captured, but also catastrophic in the extent to which its immediate effect was to lead to a marked decline in crusading fervour in the west: it was, indeed, the last major international expedition to be mounted by the traditional crusading powers, and as such, its collapse had the broadest repercussions on the entire movement: repercussions that were felt most particularly in the Burgundian circles within which La Sale was now moving. Philippe de Mézières, for instance (c. 1327-1405), was particularly active, and is particularly informative: his *Consolation de la desconfiture de Hongrie*, addressing the Nicopolis disaster, was dedicated to Philippe le Hardi, Duke of Burgundy in 1396, and at roughly the same date he also prepared a brief for a *Chevalerie de l'Ordre de la Passion*, which was designed to explain "comment se pourroyent mieulx ne plus legierement conquerer et recouvrer les royaumes et empires que l'Amourah et Baxeta son fils ont conquesté en la crestienté" – although it would have demanded so huge an investment in men and money that it was never of any practical use³.

1 See J. Paviot, "Boucicaut et la croisade (fin XIV^e-début XV^e siècle)", *La noblesse et la croisade à la fin du Moyen Âge (France, Bourgogne, Bohême)*, ed. Martin Nejedlý and Jaroslav Svátek, Toulouse, Université de Toulouse-Le Mirail, 2009, p. 69-83, and N. Housley, "Le Maréchal Boucicaut à Nicopolis", in *Actes du colloque international "Nicopolis, 1396-1996": Dijon 1996*: special number of *Annales de Bourgogne*, 68, 3, 1996, p. 85-99.

2 On the Nicopolis crusade itself, see A. S. Atiya, *The Crusade in the Later Middle Ages*, London, Methuen, 1938, p. 435-462, and A. S. Atiya, *The Crusade of Nicopolis*, New York, AMS Press, 1978. For the "change of mood" in its wake, see J. Riley-Smith, *An Illustrated History of the Crusades*, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 277.

3 See *Une épître lamentable et consolatoire adressée à Philippe le Hardi, duc de Bourgogne, sur la défaite de Nicopolis, 1396*, ed. P. Contamine and J. Paviot with C. Van Hoorebeeck, Paris, Société de l'Histoire de France, 2008; see also P. Contamine, "La Consolation de la desconfiture de Hongrie, de Philippe de Mézières (1396)", *Actes du colloque international*

The court of Burgundy, under the self-styled “grands ducs du Ponant”, had therefore throughout the fourteenth and earlier fifteenth centuries toyed particularly and persistently with the idea of a major crusade¹: the memory of Nicopolis remained fresh, and the dukes were very active in pursuit of western retaliation²; as Jacques Paviot and Judith Guéret-Laferté point out, it is remarkable how much of the Burgundian vernacular library deals with the Orient³. But as Yves Lacaze shows, preparations reached fever pitch following that second Christian disaster, the fall of Constantinople, in the years between 1453 and 1456⁴: spies and informants were commissioned to report on the potential for a crusade – on the suitability, for instance, of sea-ports⁵; the Burgundian court encouraged, or commissioned, works intended to underline the urgency of the need, and the suffering of the city of Constantinople⁶;

“*Nicopolis, 1396-1996*”, p. 35-47, and *Épître à la maison de Bourgogne sur la croisade turque projetée par Philippe le Bon (1464)*, ed. G. Doutrepoint, Louvain, bureaux des “Analectes”, 1908. On de Mézières and the crusade more generally, see N. Jorga, *Philippe de Mézières, 1327-1405, et la croisade au XIV^e siècle*, Paris, E. Bouillon, 1896. On the quantity of books concerning the Orient in the Burgundian ducal library, see J. Guéret-Laferté, “Le livre et la croisade”, *Le Banquet du Faisan, 1454*, ed. Caron and Clauzel, p. 107-114.

- 1 See J. Paviot, “La croisade bourguignonne aux XIV^e et XV^e siècles: un idéal chevaleresque?”, *Francia*, 33, 2006, p. 33-68, and J. Paviot, *Les ducs de Bourgogne, la croisade et l'Orient (fin XIV^e siècle-XV^e siècle)*, Paris, Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2003.
- 2 On all these preparations and provisions, see Paviot, *Les ducs de Bourgogne, passim*.
- 3 See J. Paviot, “Les circonstances historiques du Vœu du Faisan”, in *Le Banquet du Faisan, 1454*, ed. Caron and Clauzel, p. 63-70, and J. Guéret-Laferté “Le livre et la croisade”, also in *Le Banquet du Faisan, 1454* p. 107-114; see also in particular E. J. Moodey's excellent *Illuminated Crusader Histories for Philip the Good of Burgundy*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2012.
- 4 See Y. Lacaze, “Politique ‘méditerranéenne’ et projets de croisade chez Philippe le Bon: de la chute de Byzance à la victoire chrétienne de Belgrade (mai 1453-juillet 1456)”, *Annales de Bourgogne*, 41, 1969, p. 5-42; for Philippe's interest in Constantinople, see A. Grunzweig, “Philippe le Bon et Constantinople”, *Byzantion*, 24, 1954, p. 47-61.
- 5 Grunzweig, “Philippe le Bon”. Philippe, for instance, sent Waleran de Wavrin and the Byzantine Jean Torzelo to explore the terrain, and Geoffroy de Thoisy to prepare memoranda of advice on sea access; in 1455, he had Jean Miélot translate the *Directorium ad passagium faciendum*, by the Dominican Raymond Étienne; he also ordered a transcription of Bertrandon de la Broquière's *Voyage*, and a translation of Burcard de Saxe's *Descriptio Sanctae Terrae*. On preparations and explorations at Philippe's court, see M. Barsi, “Constantinople à la cour de Philippe le Bon (1419-1467). Comptes rendus et documents historiques. Avec édition du manuscrit B.n.F fonds français 2691 du récit de Jacopo Tedaldi”, *Sauver Byzance de la barbarie du monde. Gargnano del Garda (14-17 maggio 2003)*, ed. L. Nissim and S. Riva, Milan, Cisalpino, 2004, p. 131-195.
- 6 A certain Jean Germain, for instance, produced a little flurry of pro-Crusade treatises: a *Débat du Chretien et du Sarrazin*, a *Discours du Voyage d'Oultremer*; see F. Berriot, “Images de l'Islam dans le *Débat* manuscrit de Jean Germain (1450)”, *Bulletin de l'Association d'étude*

busy embassies were sent, in general and as it turned out fruitlessly, to possible European allies, Rome, Naples, England; Guillaume Fillastre and Simon de Lalaing were recruited to drive the project and equip an army¹; in 1455, Pope Calixtus III issued a papal bull proclaiming a crusade, to depart for the East in March 1456².

Philippe, in other words, instituted energetic recruitment for a crusade of rescue for Constantinople throughout 1453, 1454, and 1455³ – and as a member of the household of a family so closely associated with the Burgundian court, Antoine de La Sale cannot but have been aware, however distantly, of the ferment of preparation around the ambition of a *voiage de Turquie*. At the very least, he must have been aware of the recruitment drive: the embassy to Henry VI, in England, was for instance entrusted to Louis's uncle Jean de Luxembourg, comte de Ligny⁴. It is, of course, always dangerous to speculate on a writer's reasons for taking his fiction in a particular direction, but the use of multiple modes of reference to signify historical reality – deliberate links to the crusading champion Boucicaut; assiduous incorporation of a wealth of detail which suggests the historical accuracy of *Sainttré's* fictional universe; "documentary" segments, like the painstaking lists of participants, with blazons, to which we have already referred, or the geographical descriptions, studiously transcribed⁵, of the pagan lands from which the *Sarrazins* are said to originate; the fact indeed that

sur l'humanisme, la réforme et la renaissance, 14, 1981, p. 32-41. One might add, musically, Guillaume Dufay's *Lamentatio Sancti matris Ecclesiae Constantinopolitane*, possibly composed in the context of the *Vœux du paon* (c. 1454).

- 1 According to Georges Chastellain, Fillastre was by far the most energetic proponent of the crusade: "estoit celuy seul qui plus laboroit en l'avancement du saint voyage, car le duc son maistre, qui estoit le souverain susciteur de cecy, en mist toute la sollicitude en sa main, avecques messire Simon de Lalaing, conjoins ensemble" (*Chroniques*, in *Œuvres*, ed. K. de Lettenhove, Brussels, Heussner, 1863-1866; repr. Geneva, Slatkine, 1971, vol. 3, p. 332).
- 2 Which prompted numerous pledges – although in the end only Alphonso V of Portugal departed: Philippe finally declined, saying that he was the one who "plus estoit loings et plus circuy de difficultés pour y mener armée" (see Chastellain, *Chroniques*, vol. 3, p. 119).
- 3 See J. Paviot, "La dévotion vis-à-vis de la Terre sainte au x^v siècle: l'exemple de Philippe le Bon, duc de Bourgogne (1396-1467)", *Autour de la première croisade. Actes du Colloque de la Society for the Study of the Crusades and the Latin East (Clermont-Ferrand, 22-25 juin 1995)*, ed. M. Balard, Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne, 1996, p. 401-411.
- 4 J. Paviot, "Angleterre et Bourgogne: deux voies vers la croisade au x^v siècle", *Publications du Centre européen d'études bourguignonnes (xiv^e-xvi^e siècles)*, 35, 1995, p. 27-35.
- 5 See JS, p. 212-214; no commentator has so far identified the source of La Sale's information.

Saintr  is an historical figure, despite the fact that La Sale allows himself considerable latitude in presenting him – all this suggests that La Sale is studiously coordinating his fictional hero’s deeds around a handful of familiar historicities...

And this, I believe, precisely in a way that is familiar from “counterfactual” fiction¹. The resonances of “crusade” in the mid-fifteenth century are such that what I called above the “doubleness” of *Jehan de Saintr * – history+fiction – must have been immediately perceptible²: after all, Nicopolis, and the Prussian crusades, were still within living memory, and especially so in the circles where La Sale was now employed; epistemologically, where, say, the “realities” of a *Gilles de Chin* or a *Gillion de Trazegnies* might be unverifiable, La Sale’s readers must have recognised that he is engaging with the legacy of a century or so of notoriously failed crusading ventures; quite apart from court memory, he was writing, now, in an environment where historical writing was sophisticated, and widely available. Saintr ’s spectacularly successful, and highly romanticised, crusade would be read, as his own use of them makes clear, against the “chivalric biographies” where the Lalaings and the Boucicauds are celebrated certainly, but with at least a modicum of sober realism³. La Sale is, I believe, focusing a complex and dismaying historical nexus in the story of Saintr ’s chivalric triumph – and enlisting the devices of imaginative fiction to counteract the actual disaster of history⁴. His is a revisionist, dialectical game with the extratextual historical reality with which his readers – the dedicatee Jean de Calabre, the family of his new patrons – were painfully familiar: he depicts a new horizon of possibility, a happily reassuring pseudo-historical

1 See the essays in *Counterfactual Thinking – Counterfactual Writing*, ed. D. Birke, M. Butter and T. K ppe, Berlin, de Gruyter, 2011, especially that by R. Saint-Gelais, “How To Do Things with Worlds: From Counterfactuality to Counterfictionality”, p. 240-252. For a socio-cultural perspective, see R. N. Lebow, “Counterfactuals, History and Fiction”, *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung*, 34, 2009, p. 57-73.

2 Although there did also exist a “myth” of the crusade, conveyed for instance in fictions or *chansons de geste* like those making up the so-called Cycle de la Croisade: see S. Duparc-Quioc, *Le cycle de la croisade*, Paris, H. Champion, 1955, and on the “myth” more generally, A. Dupront, *Le mythe de croisade*, Paris, Gallimard, 1997.

3 See  . Gaucher, *La biographie chevaleresque. Typologie d’un genre (XIII^e-XV^e si cle)*, Paris, H. Champion, 1994, and Szkilnik, *Jehan de Saintr , passim*.

4 For examples of similar enterprises, in the Middle Ages and later, see Evans, *Altered Pasts*, especially chapter 1, “Wishful Thinking”, p. 5-43. Evans stresses, rightly, that counterfactual histories of this sort often emerge from times of uncertainty: they are often permeated by “nostalgia and regret for a history that had taken the wrong turn” (p. 18).

world open to the potential of revolutionary transformation, and a world particularly reassuring, of course, in the context of the new and urgent need for success in the threatened East. His counterfactual history, changing and reversing outcomes produced a century earlier and at a historical turning-point, is in line, suspiciously so, with Burgundian political ambitions in the few years following the fall of Constantinople: is La Sale, who had for so long put his efforts at the service of the chivalric ceremonials loved by René d'Anjou, now employing the devices of fiction, at the behest of his new patron, in response to a contemporary disaster, and to skew the past to serve a different, crusading present? Burgundian *prosateurs*, after all – in that genre, *mise en prose*, so ingrained at the ducal court – seem to have seen it as their mission to glorify a chivalry “of old”, and to have augmented and celebrated traces of “crusade” in the *chansons de geste* and romances which they reworked¹. Is Saintré’s gloriously successful crusade not simply a further refinement, to be read by its contemporaries as an earnest of the possible? If so, politically, the counterfactual crusade would invite its readers to forget the humiliation of Nicopolis and to imagine, perhaps to engage in, the new venture promulgated at the Burgundian court by moralists, propagandists – and by the duke himself: the Count of Saint-Pol, after all, Louis de Luxembourg, was a luminary of the Burgundian crusading movement: what better way for La Sale to curry favour in a new environment, with new patrons, than to adopt a major enthusiasm of their court? *Jehan de Saintré* offered its readers a complex and satisfying mix: a burlesque love-story, of course – but perhaps more gratifying, the pseudo-history of an epoch when, perhaps, chivalry was especially celebrated, and when, counterfactually, a crusading army could triumph, gloriously, over the massed armies of the infidel.

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1 See G. Doutrepont, *Les mises en prose des épopées et des romans chevaleresques du XIV^e au XVI^e siècle*, Brussels, Palais des Académies, 1939; repr. Geneva, Slatkine, 1969; more recently A. Petit, “L’activité littéraire au temps des ducs de Bourgogne: les mises en prose sous le mécénat de Philippe le Bon”, *Synergies*, 2, 2007, p. 59-65, and F. Suard, “Les mises en prose épiques et romanesques: les enjeux littéraires”, in *Mettre en prose aux XIV^e et XV^e siècles*, ed. M. Colombo Timelli, B. Ferrari and A. Schoysman, Turnhout, Brepols, 2010, p. 33-52.